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The Constitutionalist Government Confronted with the Sanitary and Educational Problems of Mexico

Address Delivered by
ALBERTO J. PANI, C. E.
to the members of the
American Academy of Political and Social Science
and of the
Pennsylvania Arbitration and Peace Society
in
"WITHERSPOON HALL," PHILADELPHIA, PA., U. S. A.
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City. General Director: Manuel Marroquin y
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THE CONSTITUTIONALIST GOVERNMENT CONFRONT-
ED WITH THE SANITARY AND EDUCATIONAL
PROBLEMS OF MEXICO.

Mr. Chairman:

Members of the Academy and of the Pennsylvania Arbitra-
tion and Peace Society:

Ladies and Gentlemen:—

During the most acute and violent period of an Armed Revolution—a veritable chaos in which it would seem that the people, after destroying everything try to commit suicide in a body—the news of isolated cases however horrible they may be, cease to cause a deep impression, before the awfulness of the general catastrophe. As the struggle reaches some form of organization by the grouping of men around the various nuclei representing the antagonistic principles in action, individuals grow in importance until the nucleus which best interpreted the ambitions and wants of the people acquires absolute ascendancy. Then, this group is unreasonably expected to strictly fulfill all the obligations usually incumbent upon a Government duly constituted. The sensation then provoked by the news of isolated cases of misfortunes suffered by individuals, because of their very rarity, cause greater consternation.

This is precisely what is occurring with the present Mexican Government. Take any two dates from the beginning of its organization. Compare dispassionately the relative conditions of national life, and it will be necessary to admit that the country is rapidly returning to normal political and social conditions. It is also undeniable that the temporary interruption of a line of communication, or the attack on a train or village by rebels or outlaws, now causes an exaggerated impression, people forgetting that not so long ago, the greater part of the railway lines, or the cities of the Republic were in the hands of said rebels or outlaws, and that in the very territory dominated by the Constitutionalist Government, trains and towns were but too frequently assaulted.

But it is inconceivable to try to make the present Government responsible for the transgressions of its predecessors. The Revolution itself is a natural consequence of these faults. Former Governments who knew not how to prevent the Revolution, are responsible for the evils which it may have brought in its train; and should the Nation be saved, as it shall be, it will be due solely to the citizens who have been willing to sacrifice themselves. In truth it is only through personal sacrifices that it is possible to construct a true fatherland.

The enemies of the new Regime—irreconcilable because they will not accept the sacrifices imposed—are now burning their last cartridges, making the Constitutionalist Government responsible for many of the calamities which caused the Revolution, and which the Government, impelled by the generous impulse which generated it, purposes to remedy. Thus do we explain the protests of the discontented, and the monstrosity that said protests are even more energetic and louder when they defend money than when they defend life itself.

The theme of this night's address refers to one of these calamities, a shameful legacy of the past. Inimical interests are trying to attack the Constitutionalist Government on this score, though it is the first Government in Mexico which has tried to remedy this evil. Having been appointed by the First Chief in charge of the Executive Power of Mexico, Mr. Carranza, to make the study of the problem, I would only have to summarize or copy some fragments of the corresponding Report, in order to develop such a theme.

"One of the most imperative obligations that civilization imposes upon the State is to duly protect human life, to permit the growth of society. It becomes necessary to make known the precepts of private Hygiene and to put them in practice, and to enforce the precepts of public Hygiene. For the first, there is the school as an excellent organ of propaganda. For the second, with more direct bearing on healthfulness, there are principally special establishments to heal, to disinfect, to take prophylactic measures. Then there are engineering works, laws and regulations put in force by a technical personnel, or by an administrative or police corps. *It may therefore be said without exaggerating, that there is a necessary relation of direct proportion between the sum of civilization acquired by a country, and the degree of perfection attained by its sanitary organization.*"

The activities, in this respect, of General Diaz' Government, during the thirty odd years of enforced peace and of apparent material well-being, were devoted almost ex-

clusively to works to gratify the love of ostentation or speculation. Seldom were they devoted to the true needs of the country. There were erected magnificent buildings. To build the National Theatre and Capitol, both unfinished, it was planned to spend sixty millions of pesos. When it was a case of executing works of public utility, their construction was made subservient to the illicit ends pointed out. Thus for example the works of city improvement, never finished, not even in the Capital, in spite of the conditions of notorious unhealthfulness of some important towns, were always begun with elegant and costly asphalt pavements, which it became necessary to destroy and replace, whenever a water or drainage pipe had to be laid. The work of education undertaken by the Government was chiefly dedicated to erecting costly buildings for schools: it is only in this way, therefore, that we can realize that the proportion of persons knowing how to read and write is barely 30% of the total population in the Republic.

The net result of what was done in these respects during the long administration of General Diaz could not be more disastrous. If we take the average of mortality for the nine years from 1904 to 1912, the heyday of that administration, we find that in Mexico City, where the greatest sum of culture and material progress is to be found, there is a rate of mortality of 42.3 deaths for each one thousand inhabitants. That is to say:

I.—*It is nearly three times that prevailing in American cities of similar density (16.1);*

II.—*Nearly two and one half times larger than the average coefficient of mortality of comparable European cities (17.53) and*

III.—*Greater than the coefficient or mortality of the Asiatic and African cities of Madras and Cairo (39.51 and 40.15, respectively) in spite of the fact that in the former, cholera morbus is epidemic.*

The annual average, corresponding to the same period, of deaths in the City of Mexico *due to avoidable disease, if proper care for private and public Hygiene be taken*—and arraignment against the administration of General Diaz—reaches more than 11,500 deaths. Now as the deaths occasioned by the Revolution during the six years surely do not reach 70,000, then we find that the Government of General Diaz—so greatly eulogized—in the midst of peace and prosperity, did not kill fewer people than a formidable Revolution which set afire the whole Republic, and horrified the whole world.

But the truth is that General Diaz' Government did not recognize the formula of *integral progress*—the only one which truly ennobles Humanity—and wasted its energies

in showy manifestations of *a progress purely material and fictitious*, within the inevitable train of vice and corruption. The ostentatious pageant—the most shameless lie with which it has ever been attempted to deceive the world—which celebrated the anniversary of National Independence, took place exactly a few weeks prior to the Popular Revolution of 1910, before whose onrush the Government fell like a house of cards.

Let us now turn to the Constitutionalist Government. In its banner it has written the resolve to better the condition of life of the people, socially and individually, and its sincerity and energy may be seen not only in the words but in deeds.

The Constitutionalist Government during its sojourn at Vera Cruz at the close of 1914 and the beginning and middle of 1915, while the Army reconquered the territory of the Republic, at first almost wholly in the hands of the enemy, in spite of being engaged in the most active campaign in the annals of Mexican History, still found time to take up the efficient political and administrative reorganization of the country.

“Whoever may know something of our History, and may view with impartiality the long and complicated process of the formation of our nationality, from the pre-Cortes period—through the troublous time of the Conquest, colonial days under the viceroys, the wars of Independence, the convulsions only calmed by the iron hand of Diaz, of nearly one century of autonomous existence—until our own time—will be bound to discover in the salient manifestations of the life of the national organism, the unequivocal symptoms and stygmata of a serious pathological state, brought about by two principal agents: *the loathsome corruption of the upper classes, and the inconscience and wretchedness of the lower.*”

“The iniquitous means used by Don Porfirio Diaz to impose peace, during more than thirty years, not only annulled all efforts tending to remedy the evils discussed, but rather determined their greater intensity. As a matter of fact, it satisfied the omnivorous appetites of his friends and satellites; it crushed and caused the criminal disappearance of whomever failed to render tribute or bow to his will; it fostered cowards and sycophants, repressing systematically and with an iron hand, every impulse of manliness and truth. It placed the administration of justice at the unconditional disposal of the rich, paying not the slightest heed to the lamentations of the poor. In a word it increased the immorality and corruption of the small and privileged ruling class and increased in consequence the sufferings of the immense majority, grovelling

in ignorance and hunger. Therefore, the thirty or more years of praetorian peace, but served to deepen still further the secular chasm of hatred and rancor separating the two classes mentioned, and to provoke necessarily and fatally the social convulsion, begun in 1910, and which has shaken the whole country."

"The three aspects of the problem which I have presented—the economic, intellectual and moral—coincide with the purposes of *education through schools*, as ideally dreamed of by thinkers, that is as *'institutions whose object is to guide and control the formation of habits to realize the highest social good.'* But our schools, unfortunately, have not yet acquired the necessary strength to assuage in an appreciable degree, the horrible ambient immorality, or to counterweigh its inevitable effects of social dissolution."

"The true problem of Mexico consists therefore in hygienizing the population physically and morally, and in endeavoring to find through all means available, an improvement in the precarious economical situation of our proletariat."

"The part of the solution of the problem which corresponds to the Department of Education or to the Municipalities, must be realized, *establishing and maintaining the greatest possible number of schools*, to do which, their cost must be reduced by means of *a rational simplification of organization and of school programs*. This must be done without losing sight of the fact that its preferential orientations should be marked by: *the character essentially technological of the teaching*, to co-operate with all the other organs of the Government, in the work of economical improvement of the masses, and *through the diffusion of the elemental principles of hygiene*, as an efficient protection for the race."

"And finally, as the medium does constitute an educational factor more powerful than the schools themselves, *the country must, before and above all, organize its public administration upon a basis of absolute morality.*"

To come to a conclusion, restricting myself to the purpose of this address, it will suffice to say: that when the Constitutionalist Government ruled but an insignificant portion of the country there were yet sent to the principal centres of culture of the United States several hundred teachers to investigate and secure data to reform school matters in Mexico. This was done at a time when dollars were of great importance for the purchase of war material.

Subsequently, in spite of the countless obstacles which seemed to obstruct every step of the Government, the number of schools has been greatly increased. It is now much



greater than it was before the Revolution: in some it has been doubled. Besides there have been effected important works of city improvement in Mexico, Saltillo, Queretaro, Vera Cruz, etc., and the mouth of the Panuco River is about to be dredged. It has been specified in the respective contract that the soil taken out is to be used to fill in the marshy zone around Tampico, thus eliminating the chief cause of this city's unhealthfulness.

In short, in order that the Government which has arisen from the Constitutionalist Revolution may realize its program of public betterment, which implies the physical and moral hygienizing of Mexico, it is only necessary to give it time. Only some magic art could transform in a moment a group of human beings into an angel choir, or a piece of land into a Paradise.

Philadelphia, Penn., November 10, 1916.

A. J. PANI.

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